

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK LOCAL PLAN 5 YEAR POLICY REVIEW SUMMARY INTERIM REPORT NOV 2021

1. Background & Purpose of the Review

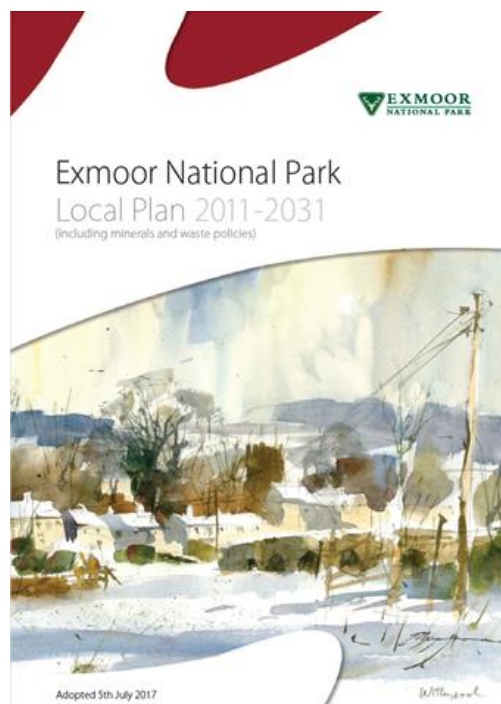
All Local Planning Authorities are legally¹ required to undertake a review of their Local Plans to assess whether they need updating at least once every five years, and should then be updated as necessary. The Exmoor National Park Local Plan was adopted in July 2017, and the 5 year review needs to be completed by July 2022. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the requirements for the review:

Policies in local plans and spatial development strategies should be reviewed to assess whether they need updating at least once every five years, and should then be updated as necessary. Reviews should be completed no later than five years from the adoption date of a plan, and should take into account changing circumstances affecting the area, or any relevant changes in national policy. Relevant strategic policies will need updating at least once every five years if their applicable local housing need figure has changed significantly; and they are likely to require earlier review if local housing need is expected to change significantly in the near future. (para 33)

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)² provides advice on what authorities can consider when reviewing a plan. In addition, the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) has published the Local Plan Route Mapper guidance to assist Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) in undertaking plan reviews and this has also been used to inform the review process.³

Exmoor National Park Authority is undertaking a review of the Local Plan to establish whether evidence suggest that a partial or complete review of the Local Plan is needed. It is important to emphasise from the outset that this does not automatically mean a full or partial review of the Local Plan needs to be carried out: the purpose of the review process is to ensure that a plan and the policies within remains effective and to establish whether any changes are needed⁴.

The outcomes of the review process to date are set out in this paper and three accompanying **Topic Papers**, on the Environment, Housing and Community, and Economy. The review is an ongoing process and the topic papers will be updated and added to following the workshop.



¹ Regulation 10A of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012)

² NPPG, Plan making, Plan reviews, paragraphs 062 to 070 (reviewed Oct 2019)

³ PAS Local Plan Route Mapper & Toolkit - reviewing and updating local plan policies

⁴ NPPG Paragraph: 064 Reference ID: 61-064-20190315 Revision date: 15 03 2019

2. Approach

In determining whether a Local Plan needs to be updated, there are several different aspects to be considered:

- Follow the latest national guidance and legislative requirements for Local Plan Reviews⁵
- Consider changes in national policy and if the Local Plan is still policy compliant
- Look at what monitoring is telling us about the effectiveness of the current policies
- Research and understand the implications of new and updated evidence
- Carry out a review of housing delivery as required by Local Plan Policy M1-S1
- Consider changes to local circumstances, such as a change in local affordable housing need
- Check whether issues have arisen that may impact on the deliverability of Local Plan objectives and policies, particularly in relation to delivery of local need affordable housing, including significant economic changes that may impact on the viability of housing delivery
- Consider ENPA's appeals performance and whether this suggests specific policies need to be reviewed where appeals are being lost
- Explore whether any new social, environmental or economic priorities may have arisen
- Consider cross-boundary issues with neighbouring authorities and other strategic priorities with relevant statutory / partner organisations

It is important to also note that there are other issues to be taken into consideration when conducting the review. One of these is the context of potential changes to the planning system as set out in the Government's Planning White Paper 'Planning for the Future'⁶. If implemented, these proposals would significantly change the format and purpose of Local Plans, and the plan-making process. However, the Government is yet to respond to the consultation, and any changes will require new legislation and consequently will not be introduced within the timeframe of this review process. ENPA will therefore continue to follow current requirements for the review.

The other consideration for ENPA is resource constraints, including available staff capacity and budgets. The time and resources required to undertake the Local Plan review and any further review of policies is significant. This will have knock-on implications for other parts of the service, particularly in relation to supporting implementation of the Plan, and delivery of local needs affordable housing.

⁵ Some of these are set out in PPG Paragraph: 065 Reference ID: 61-065-20190723

⁶ [Planning for the future \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future)

3. National Policy Check and Evidence Review

Officers have checked that adopted plan policies still reflect current national planning policy requirements in the 2021 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The analysis has focused on changes since the 2012 NPPF because an independent inspector concluded that the Exmoor Local Plan policies were in line with the 2012 NPPF and much of the 2021 NPPF has been carried forward from 2012.

New and updated evidence has also been reviewed including on the economy, housing, biodiversity, historic environment and climate. An update of local housing need was commissioned to inform the review and Local Plan monitoring as required under policy M1-S1. Recent guidance⁷ from the Planning Advisory Service has encouraged LPAs to consider the proportionality of the evidence base needed to support a Local Plan. It is the LPA's responsibility to produce the necessary evidence, but this will vary according to the local area and issues being addressed. The same principles apply to the Local Plan review process⁸.

4. The Exmoor National Park Authority Monitoring Report (AMR)

The Local Plan policies are monitored through the Authority Monitoring Report. Data is gathered on monitoring indicators linked to the objectives and the Plan's policies. Since Local Plan adoption, AMRs have been published for 2017/18 - 2018/19⁹. The 2019/20 and 2020/21 AMR is nearing completion and relevant data is summarised in the Topic Papers. Relevant monitoring data is reported in each of the Topic Papers.

5. Duty to Co-operate

A Duty to Co-operate meeting was held with local authority partners on 27 September 2021. No significant issues with the current adopted Local Plan environment policies were identified at the meeting. A number of topics were discussed and are detailed in the Topic Papers.

Various points were identified to be taken forward as a helpful basis for future discussions but were not considered to require an immediate review of the Local Plan policies. It is recognised that Duty to Cooperate discussions are an ongoing and that these matters and others will continue to be important considerations for future co-operation and to inform plan making.

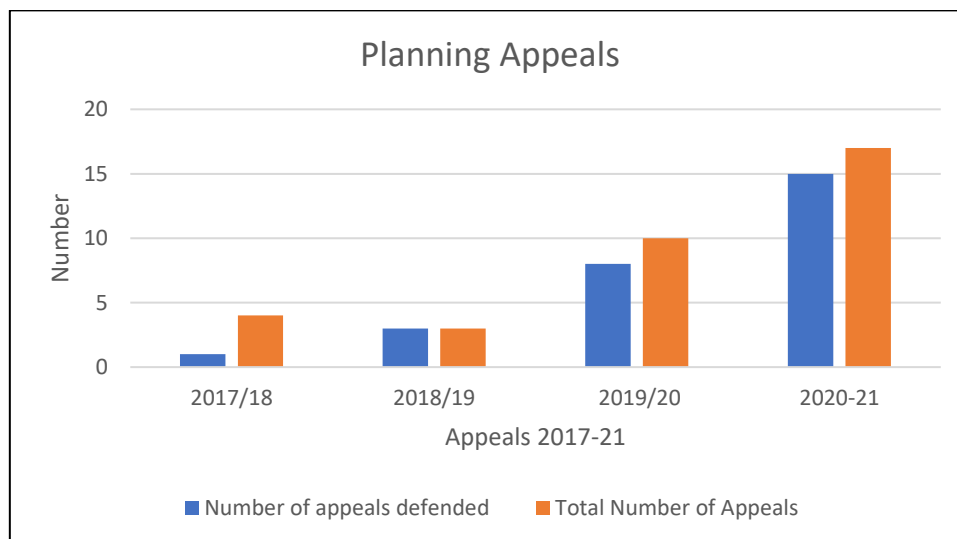
⁷ [Local Plan Route Mapper & Toolkit - reviewing and updating local plan policies | Local Government Association](#)

⁸ Paragraph: 068 Reference ID: 61-068-20190723 Revision date: 23 07 2019

⁹ [Exmoor - Annual Monitoring Reports \(exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk\)](#)

6. Review of Appeal Decisions and Development Management Comments

Officers have analysed appeal decisions since Local Plan adoption. There has been no significant increase in the number of appeals that have been allowed or appeals related to specific policy areas that, at this interim stage, indicate policies should be reviewed.



Discussions have also been held with the Authority's Development Management team to consider their comments on how the policies are being implemented when determining planning applications or making recommendations for Planning Committee. Further discussions were also held to consider the implications of changes in permitted development that have been brought in since the Local Plan was adopted.

7. Summary & Interim Conclusions

As a National Park, Exmoor has a higher level of environmental protection than other areas of the country which are not designated as Protected Landscapes. The policies in the Local Plan reflect this, and take as their starting point the statutory purposes of National Parks, which seek to conserve and enhance these special environments, as well as promoting understanding and enjoyment of them. In fulfilling these purposes, the National Park Authority has a duty to promote the economic and social well-being of local communities.

The Local Plan and its policies do not have the powers alone to deal with all issues, and there are limits to planning powers and what the planning system can deliver.

This five-year policy check of the Local Plan has identified several changes to national policy since the Local Plan was adopted in 2017. These changes are considered to have been relatively minor over the plan period so far, primarily a change in emphasis rather than a complete change in approach. Officers have reviewed the policies in the local plan against the current National Planning Policy Framework (July 2021). Following from this review it is considered that the approach in the ENP Local Plan is appropriate to the local context and National Park designation and **for the majority of the subjects covered under the broad topics of Environment, Housing & Community, and Economy, there is very good policy**

coverage in the Local Plan, and the current policies are in conformity with the NPPF.

Where there are differences, the wording in the NPPF could be used as an additional material consideration when making decisions on planning applications and giving advice. Further work is also planned which will address some of the changes in the NPPF, for example the preparation of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD).

A number of topics were analysed under each Topic and will be the subject of discussions with stakeholders. These are summarised below. Full details and background information are given in each of the accompanying Topic Papers.

Environment

Biodiversity Net Gain

There are several policies in the Local Plan relating to landscape and the natural environment (contained in chapter 4 Conserving and Enhancing Exmoor, in the Local Plan pages 37 to 86). These policies tend to refer to enhancement rather than biodiversity net gain, however it is not considered that this is in conflict with national policy, but is a different way expressing it. The revised NPPF wording and the newly passed Environment Act will add greater weight and power to the implementation of these policies. There will also be new practices and procedures for dealing with biodiversity net gain which have not yet been worked out as a consequence of the new Act.

In other local authority areas the new biodiversity metric developed by Natural England is being used as a method to assess biodiversity net gain and used in conditions on planning consents. Further work could be done within the current Local Plan policies such as a new Supplementary Planning Document or other guidance to help clarify what is required and to meet the requirements of the Environment Act.

There are issues with Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) within the National Park and their condition, as set out in the information from the Authority Monitoring Report, with approximately 81% in an unfavourable and recovering condition. The reasons for the unfavourable recovering status are relating to land management and mostly do not come under the remit of the planning system. Consequently the planning system can only act as part of a wider solution to the issues and problems that exist.

Beautiful Design

When dealing with design and creating beautiful and safe places there are many policies in the local plan covering this topic, such as GP1 Achieving National Park Purposes and Sustainable Development and CE-S6 Design and Sustainable Construction Principles. There are also policies on heritage, landscape, nature, shop fronts, extensions, biodiversity and green infrastructure, which may be relevant. All these policies are considered to contribute to creating and maintaining beautiful and safe places. The National Park Authority plans to develop a Design SPD next year.

Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

There is also considered to be a positive strategy for delivering renewable energy within the Local Plan which is appropriate for a National Park and heritage coast, set out in chapter 5 Responding to Climate Change and Managing Resources of the Local Plan, pages 105 to 117. There is a general enabling and encouraging policy CC-S1 Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation to support measures which may help reduce the impact of climate change, supported by policies dealing with specific issues including flood risk and coastal change. The Local Plan is unusual in that it includes policies for small-scale wind and solar energy development, and identifies areas of search where such development would be considered appropriate or not.

Historic Environment

The NPPF statements in relation to Heritage Assets and plan-making has changed very little from the 2012 version to the 2021 version, and since the Local Plan was adopted under the 2012 version it is considered there is no need to change the approach set out in the Local Plan. The objectives and the policies of the Local Plan are considered to provide a positive strategy to conserve the historic environment and promote enjoyment of it.

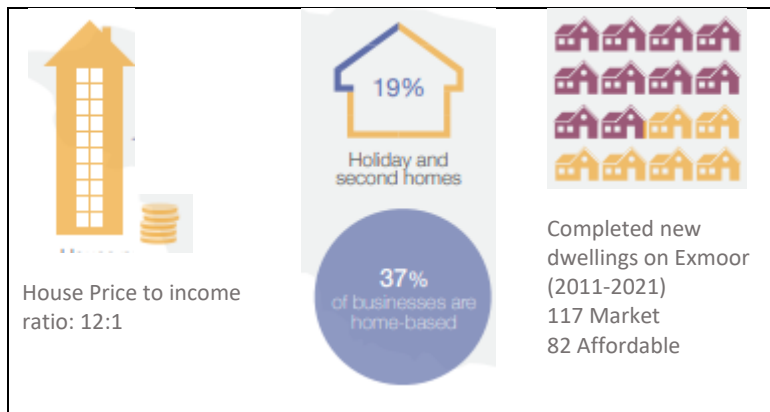
Minerals

There are considered to be few changes in legislation or national guidance affecting the minerals related policies in the Local Plan. There may however be increased interest in using local stone for construction in the National Park in the future to meet the 'build beautiful' agenda, and this is considered to be covered by exiting policy CE-S7 Small Scale Working or Re-Working for Building and Roofing Stone.

Housing & Community

Section 6 of the adopted Local Plan 'Achieving a Thriving Community' (pages 134-199) contains policies for housing and community services and facilities. The Local Plan provides a bespoke approach to planning for housing and community services and facilities on Exmoor to reflect local circumstances. A core objective of the Local Plan is to deliver affordable housing to meet the needs of local people.

From the work to date, evidence is showing an increase in house prices and the affordability gap between house prices and wages, a significant proportion of market housing still used as second/holiday homes and a continued local need for affordable housing indicating that locally needed affordable housing remains a priority for the area.



From Rural Enterprise Exmoor Vision
Updated completions and house price income ratio

Updated evidence suggests that projected levels of local affordable housing need have fallen (a reduction of 19% from 238 to 194 dwellings for the period 2011-31). Similarly, updated housing need evidence for Somerset West and Taunton District Council 2020-2040 covering the Somerset part of the National Park also shows a reduction in need beyond the end period of the Exmoor National Park Local Plan. This reflects Exmoor’s ageing population and is likely to be due to reductions in older households beyond 2030 who, on Exmoor, currently make up a higher than average proportion of households.

In practice, parish housing need surveys provide the local affordable housing need evidence to inform planning decisions. Updated surveys cover a high proportion of Exmoor’s population, and show that there are currently 53 households in local affordable housing need within ENP (compared with previous estimates of 90 homes required). This is only a snapshot in time and may not fully reflect the true need for affordable housing as not everyone who is in need will come forward. However, it provides evidence of affordable housing need across all parishes surveyed, an indication of how the housing needs of local communities are fluctuating, and where efforts to support affordable housing delivery need to be focused.

Local Plan policies provide a positive framework to maximise opportunities for local need affordable housing to come forward, providing certainty for affordable housing providers and households in local housing need including self/custom builders. Evidence from appeals decisions is not indicating a cause for concern. In terms of the existing housing stock, monitoring for all tenures of housing shows that most permissions for extensions are granted .

Analysis of updated evidence and monitoring to date does not indicate that a review of the Local Plan housing policies should be triggered. However, a number of topics have been investigated further and will be the subject of discussions with stakeholders. These are summarised below.

Affordable housing delivery

Whilst the changes in national policy and analysis of the evidence do not indicate a need to review the Local Plan policies, there are concerns over the level and speed of delivery of

sufficient affordable homes for local people. Higher house prices and an increased affordability gap between house prices and wages within the National Park are also exacerbating this situation. Further work is required to better understand the reasons behind this, although not all of the likely factors will be within the scope of planning, for example the availability of finance, either via grant or loans. The adopted Local Plan provides more flexibility than the previous Local Plan to deliver affordable housing through providing for cross subsidy “Principal Residence” housing but, on average, there were higher levels of delivery during the previous Local Plan.

One of the questions for further discussion is whether changes to policy will lead to improved delivery, or if efforts should continue to be focused on supporting delivery for example through Rural Housing Enabling and the Exmoor Rural Housing Network. Additional guidance could also assist delivery, for example for affordable housing

More housing for local people

The evidence review included the Rural Enterprise Exmoor Vision recently produced in partnership with local authorities and businesses, and adopted by the Authority. One of the issues highlighted in the Vision is the need for more housing for local people, not just affordable housing. The Local Plan has policies enabling a variety of housing for local people: As well as all new affordable housing having local need occupancy ties which can include occupancy by people moving to Exmoor to take up work in the National Park, the Plan also enables housing for rural workers, succession farm, extended family and accessible and adaptable housing. The review process will need to consider the evidence and conclude whether any changes are needed to Local Plan policies for housing. Part of ongoing policy work is to consider potential impacts of changes. For example, the evidence gathered for the current Local Plan identified that suitable sites for new housing are very limited due to physical constraints such as flooding and landscape sensitivity, and flagged up the need to ensure suitable potential sites remain for future affordable housing for local people in the longer term.

Safeguarding community facilities

Monitoring suggests there has been some loss of community facilities, some of which are outside of the control of the planning authority. In addition, proposals for changes and extensions to existing facilities are coming forward. In some cases, this has been to create ancillary additional facilities to support the existing business, in line with policies in the Local Plan, in others new facilities have been permitted or the replacement of existing facilities with another type of facility. The retention of facilities and services is an important part of maintaining thriving communities. Whilst not all losses can be controlled by planning, one of the questions for the review is to consider whether evidence shows that any changes to the policies are needed in relation to community facilities in future.

Economy

Business Development

A number of policies in the Local Plan relate to business development (contained in section 7 Achieving a Sustainable Economy of the Local Plan pages 202-218). Policies provide a criteria-based approach for business development in/adjoining the named settlements and through the reuse of buildings, extensions and appropriate redevelopment in the open countryside. Policy SE-D2 safeguards the finite supply of existing employment land and buildings Policies are included for home-based businesses reflecting the recent Rural Enterprise Work which has shown the very high number of self-employed, home-based, and micro businesses on Exmoor. The AMR monitoring indicates that the policies are enabling some new business as well as the loss of some. 10 live work/homeworking applications have been permitted since the Local Plan was adopted.

Section 7 of the Local Plan also contains policy SE-S4 for agricultural and forestry development. Monitoring through the AMR indicates that the policies are enabling agricultural and forestry development (75 agricultural and forestry buildings have been permitted since 2017 and 1,680m of agricultural and forestry tracks).

The recently finalised Rural Enterprise Exmoor (REE) vision document provides helpful information and evidence to better understand the local economy as well as a series of findings. The vision does not seek to provide a detailed delivery plan, rather it is intended to provide partners with guidance on key areas of focus for future activity, as well as to feed into the work of others. The work highlights the very high proportion of micro-businesses self-employment and home working in the National Park. The background research for Rural Enterprise Exmoor vision identified that there were nearly 1,300 businesses operating in the National Park - 60% more than were picked up from nationally available databases mainly because they were small or micro businesses. As a result, there may be a need to consider whether monitoring of the local economy can be improved.

Recreation and Tourism

Recreation and tourism policies are in Section 8 'Achieving Enjoyment for All' (on pages 220-250 of the Plan). REE and Exmoor National Park work provide a pre-Covid baseline, evidence on the impacts of Covid restrictions on business and Covid recovery. 60% of employment in the National Park is in tourism while accommodation and food and drink services are the largest business sector - 38% of total businesses and 44% of all employment. The work highlights the challenges faced by the tourism sector as a result of Covid restrictions. Analysis of the AMR indicates that Plan policies are enabling tourism related development to come forward – 14 applications have been permitted since 2017. Six serviced accommodation businesses (hotels and guest houses) have been lost although one application was permitted in 2020/21. By contrast 17 non serviced accommodation applications (holiday lets) have been permitted since the Plan was adopted. Relatively low numbers of new camping accommodation including camping barns and alternative camping

accommodation such as shepherd's huts have been determined since the Local Plan was adopted. The figures do not include 'pop up campsites' which can operate for a limited number of days per year within permitted development rights. The number of days has been increased from 28 to 56 days during the Covid -19 pandemic.

Analysis of the AMR shows that Plan policies are enabling recreational development. In particular, 18 equestrian developments have been approved since the Plan was adopted.

Electronic communications

Electronic communications (and transport) policies are in section 9 'Achieving Accessibility for All' on pages 252 to 273 of the Local Plan. Plan policies are considered to be in line with national policy and the NPPF is taken account of as a material consideration in decision making. Introducing high quality fast digital communications to the whole of the National Park has been challenging for a variety of reasons including a dispersed population, deep rurality and difficult terrain although Exmoor is not alone in having experienced delay in the rollout of communications infrastructure. It is not considered that this is due to Local Plan policies.

AMR monitoring shows that 16 telecommunication masts have been approved since adoption of the Local Plan. The Government has extended permitted development rights for electronic communications infrastructure in National Parks. Under existing regulations, an existing ground-based mast can be extended up to 20 metres above ground level through permitted development rights, or up to the height of the existing mast (if taller), without the need for prior approval which means that development is not managed through the Local Plan. The Government has consulted on extending the height of masts in National Parks permitted in this way to 25 metres.

Innovative solutions and an approach suited to local circumstances continues to be needed to improve coverage. The Local Plan seeks to enable the roll out of infrastructure in a way that protects Exmoor's landscape. A recent appeal decision for an emergency telecommunications mast has been a concern.

Coverage and speed of connections remains an issue for businesses. The Rural Enterprise work and vision has highlighted digital connectivity as a key objective.

Interim Conclusions

The Local Plan was adopted in 2017 and 4 years on, **there does not appear to be grounds to suggest changes are needed to planning policies in the Local Plan based on the review of national policy, updated evidence, Duty to Co-operate discussions, and monitoring.** We are, however, only part way through the review process, and discussions with stakeholders may highlight other issues for consideration.

8. Stakeholder Engagement

The NPPF does not place any requirements on local planning authorities regarding stakeholder engagement during any Local Plan review process. However, as the purpose of

plan-making is to *'provide a positive vision for the future of each area; a framework for addressing housing needs and other economic, social and environmental priorities; and a platform for local people to shape their surroundings*' (NPPF para 15), it is important to gather stakeholder views on the current Local Plan and the need to review all or some of the policies.

A stakeholder event is being held in December 2021, where the background to the Local Plan review and the progress to date will be presented and there will be an opportunity for discussion and to hear views on the Plan. All those on the Local Plan contacts database have been invited to the workshop, along with representatives from all the parish and town councils on Exmoor, ENPA members and officers.

An online survey will also be sent out following the workshop to gather views and allow those who were not able to attend the workshop to participate in the review.

9. Next Steps

Following discussions at the stakeholder workshop in December 2021, Officers will consider all the comments and report these to Members. The survey will run until early February, and this will also need to be analysed and reported to Members. A few areas of analysis also still need to be completed, including a review of policies in the Lyn Plan, the neighbourhood plan for Lynton and Lynmouth, which also forms part of the development plan for that area of the National Park.

Once these steps have been completed, Officers will update and finalise the Topic Papers including conclusions on the review and recommendations for whether all or part of the Local Plan needs to be reviewed, or whether the policies are considered to still be up to date and no review is required. The outcomes of the review and the recommendations will be presented to an Authority meeting in the Spring, for Members to decide what the next steps will be.

If changes are required to the Local Plan, the Authority can review specific policies on an individual basis, and may publish a list of which policies they will update and which policies they consider do not need updating. Updates to the plan or certain policies within it must follow the plan-making procedure, including preparation, publication, and examination by the Planning Inspectorate on behalf of the Secretary of State¹⁰. Further work will be undertaken to set out the review process, timetable and resource implications for discussion with Members.

¹⁰ NPPG Paragraph: 069 Reference ID: 61-069-20190723 Revision date: 23 07 2019

If the review concludes that changes are not needed to the Local Plan, the Authority must publish the reasons for this decision within 5 years of the adoption date of the plan (July 2022)¹¹.

¹¹ NPPG Paragraph: 070 Reference ID: 61-070-20190315 Revision date:15 03 2019